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ABSTRACT

A research project to evaluate materials for teacher education is described that reviews the development of evaluation tools, provides new measures, and applies the new measures to current visual materials. It is expected that as the study continues, it will reveal several explicit and implicit ideological stereotypes and assumptions about beliefs about teachers, teaching, classrooms, and mediated education. In this project, media criticism and poststructuralism are integrated as a basis for improved evaluation. A sample application is given in the evaluation of teacher education visual materials: film, video, and multimedia. The aim is to begin a historical record of the field in terms of film and video, to bring a more grounded and broadly literate understanding of visual materials to theorists and practitioners, and to suggest changes in the ways teachers evaluate curricular materials. A three-part workshop that reviewed the development of evaluation measures, used an appraisal instrument to allow participants to evaluate a film, and discussed postmodernism for educators was part of the continuing research process. A handout from the workshop is included. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Researching Instructional Materials Evaluation: Adding Socio-Cultural Dimensions

by
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ED 363 294

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Research Project-Overview

Critical evaluation of instructional materials is an important but often neglected aspect of instructional preparation. Teachers do not usually select their instructional materials (in whatever the format) according to formal, generalized, research-based prescriptions for doing so. And only rarely do teachers consider criteria beyond those which are achievement and technically oriented (Rothe, 1991). Instead, we are likely to develop and use our personal, situated routines to select and evaluate materials. This study suggests evaluation that is more theoretically grounded in socio-cultural and local, context-sensitive bases than are many current selection/evaluation guides. It reviews the development of evaluation tools, provides new measures, and applies new measures to current visual materials. Using historical, formalist, and aesthetic methods, a new evaluation instrument was developed and applied to materials for teacher education. From preliminary research in this area, we expect the interpretation to reveal a number of explicit and implicit ideological stereotypes and assumptions about our beliefs about teachers, teaching, classrooms, and mediated education. We believe as our project continues that examining this visual material will provide new understanding of our field and our educational beliefs.

Background and Rationale

Evaluation of materials has traditionally been derived from the behavioral theory and the systematic design of instruction so basic to our field. However, the limitations of these theories as a basis for evaluation or selection of materials have been repeatedly pointed out by current critics of educational technology. Bowers (1988) discusses the "current blindness" of the "conduit" view of software evaluation, for example (p. 47). Bowers goes on to critique the instructional procedures of an evaluation model based upon Gagne's events of instruction. He points put that such a model ignores the subjectivity of language and the awareness of the influence of language on thought. This is just one example of criticism which points out the severe limitations of our current evaluation models.

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The field of educational communications needs to revisit our theoretical basis for the simple models of evaluation or selection which we have been teaching for so long. Kerr (1985) has suggested that methods drawn from sociology, policy sciences, and anthropology could "shed new light on problems that have traditionally been approached using psychological research methods" (p. 4) Kerr felt that asking new questions in less traditional ways was critical to the future of education. With more multi-cultural and critical dimensions of education becoming a reality, the area of materials evaluation and selection and the messages being given to teachers need to be re-examined.

Eisner (Eisner and Peshkin, 1990) suggests new methods and comments on the limitations of old models. "The methods into which we have been socialized provide powerful filters through which we view the world. If we are predisposed to focus upon the unique features of a person or situation and skilled in their literary description, we are likely to attend to classrooms in ways that emphasize or make salient the idiosyncratic. If we are inclined toward the description of measured relationships or the incidence of events, if what we are inclined to think about is how things co-vary, we see the "same" classroom from a very different angle and with a very different intent. In short, our methodological concepts influence our perception. Thereafter, cognitive maps help us find our way in the territories we wish to explore. Those with different maps tend to take different roads." (p. 9)

Yeaman (1991) discusses the importance of the socio-cultural aspects of our field, which he calls neglected. "Educational communications and technology research concentrates on the efficiency of learning stimuli, instructional techniques and matching these with student characteristics." (p. 990)

And Ellsworth (Ellsworth and Whatley, 1989) has commented that: "Such research privileges questions of how individuals process information from educational media over and above questions about the ideological work of meaning construction, content selection, setting of objectives, and media use. The concept of information processing as developed within cognitive psychology and applied in educational technology cannot explain meaning, intent and significance." (p. 49)

An examination of evaluation from a socio-cultural viewpoint begins to provide more powerful and meaningful dimensions in the evaluation of media materials, historical or cutting edge. This project integrates media criticism and post-structuralism as a basis for improved evaluation, and provides a sample application. The application involves teacher education visual materials: film, video and multi-media.

Teachers have conceptual and attitudinal knowledge of technology based on the media used to teach them

about the technology. These media remain largely unexplored from both an aesthetic and a critical or formal perspective. Likewise, only recently have a few scholars turned their attention to the older educational films and videos in order to explain their messages, overt and otherwise. The visual representations and the actual construction of knowledge in these materials are now beginning to be investigated. Ellsworth's (Ellsworth and Whatley, 1990) research is an example of such work and is used to guide the work presented here.

In their text, *The Ideology of Images in Educational Media*, (1990), Ellsworth and Whatley discuss this recent move to examine the ideology of images. They point out that until very recently, educational communications research was still focused on effectiveness and on how learners gain from mediated messages. Recently, educational media researchers have turned their attention to educational films and other materials, and are investigating the visual representations and the actual construction of knowledge. Ellsworth cites examples of studies using science and health films and print materials.

Using Ellsworth's text as a model, this project involves materials used to teach teachers about communications media and "technology." Many such materials have been produced and used in college classrooms to introduce the use of "amazing" new media to future teachers. Most university film or media libraries have many such materials in their collections, some dating as early as the 1940s and some as recent as 1990. These films, with titles such as *Teaching with Sound Film* (1940, Encyclopedia Britannica Education Corp.) and *Audio Visual Materials in Teaching* (1956, Coronet Instructional Films) were designed and produced to encourage future and current teachers to properly and effectively use 16mm films in their classrooms.

Anticipated Outcomes

The aim of this work is to begin an historical record of our field in terms of film and video; to bring a more grounded and broadly literate understanding of instructional materials to both theorists and practitioners; and to suggest substantial changes in the ways teachers evaluate curricular materials for teaching.

The results will be summarized and examined for the messages we can discover involving materials, teachers, pedagogy, and technology. In addition, this work will focus on the hidden curriculum of such messages, describe what was considered valid knowledge, and determine who possessed it. Our educational culture will be described, and new ways of looking at educational media will be explored. In completing this project we will produce a brief history of the teaching of media utilization and evaluation, a new evaluation tool, and analysis of several mediated materials. These outcomes should be useful to those working on visual literacy enhancement in pre-service teachers.

Research-in-Progress
Workshop Conduct

The workshop in Pittsburgh had three sections, and was part of the research process. Part one reviewed the development of evaluation measures from an historical perspective. Several older evaluation instruments were shared to present an overview of the elements common and unique over time. Evaluation instruments representing five decades revealed common concerns for educational film content, technical quality, and audience appropriateness. The earliest form (Devereux, 1935) was rigorous and detailed reflecting concerns related to the instructional vs. entertainment issues of the era. Current forms were streamlined to brief "reviews" incorporating likert scale ratings with opportunities for comments.

The second section used a popular appraisal instrument (Heinich, et. al., 1989, p. 238) to allow participants to evaluate an older educational film entitled "How to Use Classroom Films" (Crm/McGraw-Hill Films, 1963). With categories including Relevance, Effectiveness, and Pacing to guide the evaluation process, this instrument lead participants to comment upon the film's likely success in teaching teachers about the use of film. Since the material was dated, the participants could concentrate upon the production's style and the evaluation instrument. The appraisal checklist as presented was found to be missing important aspects. Participants in discussions observed that teachers in the film were considered consumers of materials and were encouraged to examine materials for their objectives and effectiveness alone. Criteria involving bias were limited to one line, and were unexplained. Teachers, it was noted, were also given little input as to the possible uses or value of the material.

Section three introduced postmodernism and its emergence as an important viewpoint for educators (see Suggested Reading List). Questions raised by a postmodern perspective include issues of emancipation, ethical behaviors, and empowerment. In media postmodernism leads us to question who is delegitimized and "othered" by mass media such as television. These same questions were then raised while reviewing a newer educational videotape from a series. A new evaluation form based upon work by Rothe, (1991) was shared. This form was prepared using socio-cultural analysis aspects to provide several meaningful new dimensions to the evaluation process (see Instructional Materials Evaluation). Participants were invited to use and critique this new instrument, and comment upon its perspective and its usability. Discussion followed about the process and the viability of socio-cultural evaluation in schools and by teachers. The new form encourages viewers to "see" in a new way; to not ignore important if subliminal visual aspects.

Copies of handouts are included after the references so that readers may participate further in the ideas suggested by this research. People

wishing to field test the new instrument should contact us for further information; we are interested in its use and dissemination. Any suggestions or additions readers wish to recommend should be sent to the authors.

This research project, as it continues, hopes to establish new criteria for the examination and use of visual materials. Teacher educators and teachers will promote a more visually literate audience with these materials.

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Instructional Materials Evaluation

Title: _____

Source, Date, Length, Cost: _____

Subject Area/Audience: _____

Brief Description/Subject Matter: _____

_____

Language Usage	Does Not Apply	Not at All Poor	Some-What	Completely Well
1. Is the language used context specific?				
2. Will students understand the concepts presented, especially those presented within metaphors using familiar words in new ways?				
3. Is one point of view presented without the acknowledgement of other possibilities?				
4. Is the language used appropriate to the content but broad enough to allow other points of view?				
Comments:				
Perspectives				
5. Is the framework for content selection explained?				
6. Is the design of the information obvious? Are designers' choices explained?				
7. Does the knowledge presented allow flexibility for student and teacher involvement?				
8. Is this material marketed in an easily usable and available format?				
9. Is material designed to reflect mainstream society's assumptions concerning relevant cultural features such as responsibility, education, career, family, religion, etc.?				

Perspectives Cont.	Does Not Apply	Not at All Poor	Some-What	Completely Well
10. Does the material promote and reflect the distinctive character and values of all cultures?				
11. Is this material directed to the largest number of users to the exclusion of minority or smaller groups within the educational population?				
12. Is the value framework for this material evident?				
13. Are the students or teachers given the opportunity to question or explore the values framework used?				
14. Do the values presented interface with the values held by users?				
Comments:				
Curricular/Strategy Issues				
15. Is this material promoting effective and efficient learning to the exclusion of more broadly-based learning outcomes?				
16. Is the underlying message of this material that technologically driven learning is preferred over other types of learning?				
17. Is the material appropriate educationally rather than selected as a result of some commercial effort?				
18. Is using this material the soundest solution to the educational problem involved?				
Comments:				

Derived from Rothe, J. P. (1991). Critical evaluation of educational software from a social perspective: Uncovering some hidden assumptions. In Hlynka, D. and Belland, J. (eds). Paradigms Regained, New Jersey: Educational Technology Press, pp. 367-384.

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